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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

POLICY PLANNING COUNCIL

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November 6, 1962

TO: S/G/PM Mr. Gantsoff

FROM: S/P - Mose Harvey

SUBJECT: Your Memorandum of November 3, 1962 to W. W. Rostow  
re Likely Soviet Efforts in the Armament Field

I appreciated getting a copy of your dissent from the point of view set forth in our "Soviet Scenario", in which you question the likelihood of the Soviets giving first priority to offsetting their present disadvantage in the strategic weapons field.

As always your arguments are lucid and telling. But as I pointed out in our earlier conversations, in this one rare case they leave me both unconvinced and troubled.

I might point out in the first instance that the issue is not the chimera of military superiority. The Soviets, as I understand, are presently in a position of definite strategic inferiority. According to intelligence estimates, with their present inter-continental strike capability they cannot hope to survive a nuclear exchange with us, even if they should strike first, while they cannot be sure that the US would not survive. In other words, they lack what either we or they would consider an absolute deterrent.

The "Scenario" suggests the Soviets before all else will want, if humanly possible, to overcome this inferiority. They will not want to deal with the US "from a position of weakness: if they can at all avoid it. If while seeking to attain "real equality", they happen to get superiority, so much the better. But the essential thing for them would be to be able to deal as equals.

Here I would see as a most important thing for us to remember: the fact that, as far as we know, those who are now calling the shots in Moscow are the same ones who decided upon the Cuban venture. This venture, I submit, was an utterly serious matter, and one not to be dismissed as "a long shot gamble", lightly taken. That the Soviets grossly miscalculated our reaction is possible. But before assuming miscalculation rather than strong compulsion, we should give great weight to certain imponderables: why did Khrushchev go to such lengths to deceive the President? If he did not expect the US to

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react violently why did he bother to deceive? Why did Khrushchev back down without testing our will? Why did he not play the Security Council debate, etc., game for at least a trial period?

I would agree that we have much to hope for from the resources pinch affecting the Soviet rulers. In the long pull, and assuming we keep a step ahead all of the way, this pinch may be decisive. But I see no reason to believe the Soviets will simply accept inferiority rather than to tighten their belts further in an effort to overcome that inferiority, as long at least as they have any hope of doing so.

As I read Soviet history, in both olden and later days, it strikes me that the leadership has always put military strength at the top of their list of requirements. It has been the prime justification for priority on heavy industry (even above building a base for "socialist construction"). In even the most trying times, the need "to catch up" militarily has not been neglected. Does it not mean something that in the terrible post-war years, military modernization was pressed with such astonishing speed (including mechanization of ground forces, shift to jet-propelled air forces, development of nuclear and then thermonuclear weapons, and the drive forward in rocketry)?

Before Cuba, there was a tendency among some of us to feel certain assurances in regard to a likely slow down in Soviet military efforts. The Soviets had neglected to develop a sizeable long-range bomber force; they had neglected ICBMs for IRBMs; they seemed to be concentrating on defensive weapons. They, in general, were said to have only limited objectives in the armaments field, because they either would not or could not spare the resources for more substantial efforts. But some of us were unhappy about these feelings of assurance. For the Soviets deliberately to drop behind seemed out of character.

The Cuban venture could well be read not just as a "long shot gamble" but as a serious attempt to deal with an unacceptable gap. They may have sought either to close the gap by a cheap by-pass, or to establish an interim balance pending the results of longer range and more decisive efforts.

These longer range efforts could be directed toward getting an "adequacy" of ICBMs. They could look toward a direct military utilization of space.

As you

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As you know, both G/PM and S/P have been concerned that we are not giving adequate attention to what the Soviets may think they can accomplish in space. Speaking for myself alone, I have been dissatisfied with the results of an extensive exploration of possibilities in this area that we carried out over some six months. Those responsible for this field in Defense and elsewhere have evinced confidence that we have nothing to worry about. They have cited such reasons as: we have no evidence the Soviets have a military space program; the Soviets resources pinch will not permit them to take on a military race in space; everything that can be done from space can be done as well from the ground.

But one can raise objections to each of these points: we seldom have advance evidence of anything the Soviets are up to; space might offer the USSR a cheaper way to race with us than any other, particularly in view of their headstart and our lack of activity; the Soviets couldn't do it as well from the ground if they didn't have what was necessary to do it from the ground; (they said they could do anything they wished from the USSR, but they went into Cuba).

Cuba could well have been an effort to get equality without paying heavy costs for it. But does it follow that having failed to get equality cheaply, they will give up the efforts to get it?

I appreciate that the Soviets may still feel they have opportunity to further Soviet interests through "familiar means". But how realistic are we when we assume they will bet on the effectiveness of these means if they are in a position where they cannot afford to look down the barrel of a gun while we can?

Bringing the case down to specifics, the Soviets since 1945 have turned their backs on any disarmament proposal that in their ever-suspicious minds has threatened to freeze them in an inferior military position (e.g., the Baruch Plan). From the standpoint of their resources problem, this has obviously and consistently represented a foolish position. But can we safely assume that the situation is altogether different now, that they have undergone a very basic change and become fully rational beings?

I believe that we can in the course of time force such a change. But for this we must demonstrate that without a doubt no money is to be made through an arms race. I concede there is an outside chance the Cuban fiasco may have constituted such a demonstration. Until, however, we receive far more conclusive evidence to this effect, I feel we should assume the reverse, that is that Cuba is the measure of the urgency with which they view the need to offset their inferiority and of the lengths to which they are willing to go to accomplish this.

cc: G - Mr. Johns  
S/P - Mr. Rostow  
S/AL - Mr. Thompson

G/PM - Mr. Kitchen